

MEMORANDUMImpressions of Poland, July, 1958

I.

The visitor to Poland today (and especially the visitor who has some acquaintance with conditions in the Soviet Union) is struck with four things:

- (1) How much the Poles are getting away with, in terms of departure from accepted Soviet patterns of "socialism";
- (2) What possibilities for success, economically, this Polish version of Socialism has, if the present agricultural revival continues and if the semi-demoralization of Polish labor, and of the youth, can be overcome;
- (3) How widely emancipated is the Polish intelligentsia from Marxist-Leninist ideological principles and from illusions about the nature of Soviet power, how firmly oriented towards the West it is, and how uninhibited in the oral expression of its thoughts and feelings; and finally
- (4) How little any of this means that Poland is, or will be in any near future, in a position to shake off communist political control or to dispense with the official military-political orientation on the Soviet Union.

II.

By way of amplification, let me say the following:

- (1) In agriculture, in particular, the present Polish situation bears no resemblance to any Soviet example. The complete freedom of speech that prevails today in Poland has nothing to do with the Soviet concept of a communist dictatorship. Even the Polish Communist Party differs strikingly from its Soviet counterpart, and particularly in those very features of internal discipline and conspiratorial exclusiveness which have at all times constituted the most distinctive attribute of the Bolshevik Party and which caused its original separation from the other Russian Social-Democrats. What exists in Poland today is actually in many respects the most acute sort of revisionism, masked only by a brave show of anti-revisionist fervor on the part of the party leaders.
- (2) As to Poland's economic situation and prospects, only the experts could, of course, give a well-founded opinion. But I was much impressed with the obvious evidences of an upsurge of sturdy, rigorous individualism in the countryside, following the abandonment of collectivization; and one would think that some of this spirit of free enterprise must make itself felt in related branches of Polish economic life. Recalling the speed with which the Soviet economy suddenly became firm and successful in the mid-fifties after decades of experimentation and semi-failure, one wonders whether

Poland, with agriculture clearly on the road to recovery, may not be on the eve of a similar change. It is true that as of today the Polish economy shows a number of imbalances, and has its pathetic aspects; and certainly labor discipline, as well as the distributive process generally, will have to show great improvement before this change can occur. But I can see no reason why the Polish brand of socialism, operating for the first time on a firm agricultural base, should not eventually produce results which would approximate, if not equal, those of some of the western welfare states.

- (3) The extraordinary freedom of expression and discussion which characterizes present-day Poland is too well-known to require much description. Almost no effort is made to conceal from the foreigner the distaste felt for Russian cultural and social influences; and no occasion is missed to emphasize Polish preference, within the limits of an obsessive nationalism, for western ways and concepts. Terror seems really to be a thing of the past - momentarily, at least - for the great mass of educated Poles; and they discuss with startling frankness, before strangers and before each other, the problems presented by their relationship with the Soviet Union and the demands which this relationship still placed on them. It would be a very difficult thing today, after all that has transpired, to press these people into that blend of frightened silence and ritualistic incantation which was the refuge of the Soviet intelligentsia in the Stalin era.
- (4) Despite all of this, there could be no more ill-founded assumption than that Poland is on the road to self-emancipation from the Soviet orientation and of escape from those narrow but important restraints on which Moscow still insists.

It must be remembered, first of all, that this sophistication, these pro-western inclinations, and this general disillusionment with Marxism-Leninism, which mark the state of mind of the intellectuals, are in no way shared by Gomulka and a number of those around him. Despite the lenience shown in certain respects, Poland continues to be run by convinced communists, who have no intention of taking the country out of the "camp of Socialism". And while the attitude of the people towards these leaders is ambivalent, with many variations and contradictions, there is nothing today to suggest that they are faced with any serious, organized movement of revolt.

Beyond this, there are two objective factors which bind Poland tightly to the Soviet orientation. There is, first, the fact of the Warsaw Pact and of the presence of Soviet garrisons within the country by agreement with the Polish Government. The example of Hungary has demonstrated the implications of these arrangements. And secondly there is the question of the western borders.

Having abandoned hope for the recovery of the eastern regions lost to Russia, the Poles view their own retention of the areas taken from the Germans as a matter of life and death. Were these areas to be forfeited there would, they feel, be too little left to Poland to permit it to be a viable state, and the result would be equivalent to another partition. They are extremely nervous about this question, because they are well aware (though they rarely admit it) that this new frontier settlement in the West is an unnatural and extreme one, into which the Russians lured them precisely for the purpose of rendering them more dependent on Russia. They have to recognize today that they have not been capable of bringing

these areas back to anything like their former populousness and prosperity, and that the depressed state of this region is a serious argument against the perpetuation of the present arrangement. Finally, they are acutely aware that no major West-German party has yet publicly committed itself to an acceptance of the new frontiers and that none, in the circumstances, could afford to do so. They appreciate that nothing short of the most formal and unequivocal acceptance of the new arrangement by all important elements of German political life could prevent the growth in Germany of a massive demand for frontier revision in future years. All this being the case, their hopes for the future are constantly haunted by their memories of the past; and it is only in the Russian orientation that they see, for the time being, any protection against the dangers that loom on their horizon. Those people were right who saw in the new frontier settlement, in 1945, the creation of an anomaly which would mortgage Polish independence to the Russians for many years to come.

III.

While the purpose of this memo is not to make recommendations for policy, I cannot refrain from pointing out the following implications of the situation I have described.

In the absence of a withdrawal of Soviet forces from Poland, of a general security treaty which could supercede the Warsaw Pact, and of an unequivocal German acceptance of the new frontiers, the best the West can hope for with respect to Poland is that the relative liberties and immunities which the Poles now enjoy should continue for so long a time that they come to be considered as rights and that any withdrawal of them would appear as a preposterous injury. This will not in itself bring liberation from Russian hegemony in matters of foreign policy; but it should permit a new generation of Poles to grow up in an atmosphere of relative intellectual freedom, and it should create a situation which could scarcely fail to work in western interests if and when the present pattern of European alliances comes again into motion. Talk of "liberation" and, in general, tactics designed to embarrass the precarious relationship now prevailing as between the Polish people, the Gomulka government, and the Soviet government, can, to the extent they are successful, have only one effect: which is to cause a tightening of the reins of the communist dictatorship and a crushing-between-the-upper-and-nether-millstones of those moderate and essentially pro-western elements whose courage and ingenuity had so much to do with winning the privileges Poland now enjoys.

These moderate Poles are inclined, for the moment, to see their own best hopes for salvation in a general reduction of international tensions. From this they hope for a greater latitude of action for themselves and a less jealous and nervous supervision from the Russian side. For the continued absence of a relaxation of tensions they blame us in considerable degree, and particularly our China policy, which they feel has had much to do with turning China into the anxious protagonist of Stalinist principles which she now appears to be.

The suggestions that international tensions ought to be reduced for their sake reflects the egocentricity to which Poles always tend; and the hopes which they place in such a development are no doubt exaggerated. But it is clear that increased general tension will always tend to jeopardize the privileges they have already received and to narrow their latitude for independent action.

In these circumstances, the best chances for American policy towards Poland would seem to lie, for the moment:

- (1) In the cordial, but not over-eager, cultivation of cultural contacts and exchanges of all sorts;
- (2) In the avoidance of anything that suggests that our policy towards Poland is designed to increase difficulties between the Polish and Soviet governments;
- (3) In the avoidance, so long as the present leniency is shown with respect to domestic conditions in Poland, of statements and propaganda designed to make trouble between the population and the Gomulka government; and
- (4) In anything that can be done on the wider international plane to break the rigid patterns of bipolarity, to reduce tensions, and to permit the Poles to play something more resembling an independent role in international affairs.

George F. Kennan

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The relative personal freedom in Poland at the present does not portend a break with the Soviet Union. The reason for this is the proximity of Soviet military forces, the govt of Poland being run by dedicated communists and the fear by Poland of losing its former German territory in the west.

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